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AN ENGLISH IMPERIALIST BUBBLE.

ANY person that reads English newspapers at the present time, will see much about a proposed imperial federation between England and her colonies, and if not very well versed in English affairs, he may be pardoned for imagining that there is a serious movement of great importance toward the attainment of this object by means of a sagacious and well-defined political scheme. As a plain matter of fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. During the year 1884 two conferences were held in London, at which a great deal of vague talk was indulged in as to the delightfulness of a permanent union between England and her colonies; but not a single practical proposal for the accomplishment of this object was placed before either conference. No two speakers seemed to agree as to methods; the only agreement consisted in inflated rhetoric about the splendor of the Empire. To the English Liberal or Democrat, most of those who took part in these deliberations were politicians of a doubtful kind, some of them connected with other very pernicious political movements, while nearly all were animated by what are termed Jingo sentiments.

Let it be noted that the strong political thinkers and leaders do not give any encouragement to this movement. Neither Gladstone, nor Derby, nor Chamberlain, neither Salisbury, nor Cairns, nor Northcote, so far as I know, has defended or proclaimed imperial federation as a theory. All of these statesmen may be, doubtless are, quite prepared to defend the colonies by force of arms, so long as they remain *de facto* portions of the British Empire. To this, few will object; but this is something quite different from imperial federation. Mr. Bright says he does not even know what this new theory means. Mr. John Morley calls it "pan-Britannic gimcrackery." Lord Randolph Churchill says it is "all moonshine." Mr. Courtney regards the movement as most pernicious,

as did his friend and political associate the late Mr. Fawcett. It is opposed by Mr. Frederic Harrison in the interests of a higher international morality, and by most advanced radicals as tending to perpetuate English political superstitions, and to impose them on the young and growing commonwealths beyond the seas. Of Canadian politicians, Sir Francis Hincks regards federation as impossible, and says that Canadians don't want it. Mr. Blake looks forward to severance between Canada and England as essential to the growth and dignity of the former country ; and the majority of the Liberal party in Canada are with him in this respect. And the diners at the Empire Club in London, a short time ago, must have been disagreeably surprised to hear Sir John Macdonald declare that federation between Canada and England was prevented by insuperable difficulties. In South Africa the two principal leaders, Messrs. Sprigg and Upington, are not only opposed to federation, but seem generally to be decidedly unfriendly toward England. Australia seems a little more bitten with the idea ; but recent events have shown conclusively a growing differentiation between the interests of England and those of her colonies in the Pacific.

The whole question is essentially a matter of details ; for the question to be asked is, What are the necessary implications of a federation ? The "Federalist," which is the principal summary of federal politics known to the world, alleges four reasons in justification of the American Federal Union : First, federation would remove the usual causes of war. Second, it would secure a more perfect administration of government. Third, it would defend the several States thus united against the neighboring powers. Fourth, it would prevent commercial rivalry. Not one of these reasons can be alleged in behalf of this imperialist proposal. There is practically no possibility of war between England and any of her colonies, or between any two or more of these colonies. But, on the other hand, it is possible that England's connection with two of them might involve her in war. South Africa might involve her in war with the Dutch, which, in view of current movements both in Europe and Africa, would sooner or later mean war with Germany. Canada might involve her in war with the United States. Such considerations would therefore lead rather to the dissolution of existing ties than to the formation of stronger ones. Let me dwell specially on the case of Canada, the colony that will probably determine the whole question.

Every one in England has admitted, since the civil war revealed to Englishmen the true stuff of which the Northern States were made, that, with whatever other nation we go to war, we must be at peace with the United States. There is one and, so far as I know, only one cause that would produce a quarrel, and that is any attempt on the part of England to build up a great empire in North America. This would mean, sooner or later, war. The excited London editors would ask for double the number of iron-clads, guns, and torpedo-boats they have recently been demanding, and a big American army and navy would soon be added to the armaments by which the world is cursed. Some English people suppose that England has already an empire in North America, and indeed such an assertion is constantly made even by educated Englishmen. Of course nothing could be more absurd. Empire, *imperium*, signifies rule, and England does not rule in North America. Canada governs herself without the slightest regard to what the opinions of England may be. The English Government exercises no more rule in Ontario or British Columbia than in New York or Massachusetts. By federation, therefore, England would not be developing still further a power already existing; she would be attempting to create a new power, and in so doing would inevitably meet with strong resistance. The path to peace, therefore, certainly lies not that way.

Nor would imperial federation secure a better administration of government. English administration may not be perfect, but it would certainly not be improved by subjection to the criticism and control of farmers in Manitoba, miners in British Columbia, lumbermen in Nova Scotia, tradesmen in Toronto, gold-diggers in Ballarat, sheep-masters in New South Wales, planters in Jamaica, and fighting missionaries and Calvinistic Dutchmen at the Cape. Nor, conversely, would the affairs of Canada or New Zealand gain by being remitted in any degree to English squires, Scotch farmers, Durham miners, London shopkeepers, and East Anglian agricultural laborers. And in any proper federation all these and many more would be called on to decide, for even in aristocratic England the days of limited suffrage are gone by forever.

Nor, thirdly, would imperial federation defend any state from the superior power of its neighbor. Practically, Canada is the only colony that has such a neighbor; and, as has been already maintained, imperial federation is just the one method

of inviting the hostility of that neighbor. A defensive alliance between all English-speaking states is practicable and just, and would answer all the purposes for which a federation could be formed.

In the next place, imperial federation could not prevent commercial rivalry, because that exists already and grows every day. Canada, Victoria, Queensland, maintain formidable tariffs expressly to keep English goods out of their markets. Interests have already grown up that will demand the retention of these tariffs as in the United States. In the case of the American Union, no interests of a special kind worth naming had grown up in any single State before federation. Hence we cannot argue from one case to the other. If commercial rivalry was to be prevented (an impossibility in the nature of things, for you cannot prevent manufacturing industries from developing in great countries abundantly supplied with raw material), it should have been done half a century ago.

But if an imperial federation were established, it could only assume one of two forms. It must either resemble the original union of the thirteen American colonies prior to the adoption of the federal Constitution of 1787, or it must resemble the present American Union as it has existed subsequent to that period. The original Union was a mere alliance of independent sovereign States, none of which could be constitutionally coerced, with a central apology for a government unable to raise men or money, with no real sanction, authority, or power. It would be superfluous for English and colonial statesmen to repeat the experiment made by the American colonies last century. But if they should adopt a true federal union similar to that of the United States, what would such a step mean? One of two things: either the *de facto* English government must become the government of the whole federal empire, or a brand-new government must be formed, to which every government in the Empire, including that of England, must be subject; or, in other words, England must cease to be a sovereign state. From this dilemma there is absolutely no escape. Can colonial politicians be admitted into the English Cabinet? Obviously not, for that Cabinet is formed necessarily on English party lines, and is pledged to carry out English party objects; unknown to the written law of the country, it is a purely national growth and cannot be made imperial. But, on the other

hand, can a new body be created to which the English Parliament, with all the colonial legislatures, should be subject ?

If any kind of federal government or parliament were created, England would of course be related to that government or parliament as any particular State is related to President and Congress at Washington. How many Englishmen can be found who, with full knowledge of the matter and without any bias of interest, would be prepared to say that the "sceptered isle," which has been a sovereign state for centuries, shall be so no longer, but shall become a single unit within a world-wide federal empire ? And under this scheme the English unit would gradually but surely decline relatively to the other units. They must increase, England must decrease ; this is the decree of nature. To these colonies belongs the future ; they must expand in resources and increase indefinitely in population. But England herself has no such future. She may be, probably will be, the great center of culture and of intellectual production for the English-speaking peoples. It may be given to her to spiritualize the English-speaking democracy of the world. To her the inhabitants of distant regions may repair to visit their ancestral seats and to drink from the ancient fountains of historical inspiration. But in the future power will depend absolutely on population plus material resources ; and as the colonies will in time easily surpass England in these matters, it follows that in a federation she would sooner or later be relegated to a very subordinate position. As a sovereign state, even though small, England would control her own destiny ; as a unit in a federal empire, she would be compelled to acquiesce in whatever millions of other people in every part of the world thought was good for her. The advocates of imperial federation do not, it is true, mean this. They intend, in some inexplicable way, that this federal empire shall redound to the glory of Great Britain, and give her a prestige she cannot otherwise acquire. They are for the most part people who hold that any country is specially honored by being connected with England, and cannot possibly imagine that a people may have great respect and regard for England, and yet may not in the least desire to share her political life. In short, they desire to extend and intensify the political power of England at any cost—at the cost of bloodshed in Egypt and the Soudan, Zululand and the Transvaal ; at the cost of a gigantic and ever-increasing expenditure in England ; at the cost of domestic democratic

reform, which many advocates of imperial federation wish to prevent by distracting the attention of the country with the problems arising out of a spirited foreign policy ; and lastly at the expense of the whole future of the colonies themselves.

For it is this last consideration that is the real pith of the whole matter. Imperialists do not understand that this question will be settled by the colonies themselves, and not at all by England. The imperialists never concern themselves with the legitimate interests of the colonies, but always with the prestige and fancied interests of Great Britain. It is such an honor, they think, to be connected with England, that they assume that the interests of the colonies must lie in such a union. This may be natural from an English point of view, but it is a palpable *petitio principii*. English prestige and interests have nothing to do with what is purely a colonial question. And the chief objection to these federation schemes is, that they attempt to set aside decrees of nature and facts of politics in favor of some artificial contrivance of their own. England's colonies are separated from her by thousands of miles of sea, and they consequently belong to different political systems. England herself has always belonged, and will continue to belong, to the European system. She cannot help herself in this matter, but must remain within the limits of the European diplomatic circle, of which for centuries she has been an integral part. To this she is pledged by a hundred guarantees, a thousand treaties. She is interested in the Eastern question, in the neutrality of Belgium, in the independence of Holland. With none of these matters have the people of the United States anything to do. Why should the people of Canada have anything to do with them either ? Their interest is on the American continent, that of English statesmen is on the European and the other continents of the old world. England has European possessions ; she owns Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Heligoland. She is bound by the Anglo-Turkish convention to defend the Asiatic dominions of the Porte against attack ; and there are not wanting people in England who would go to war to prevent Constantinople from falling into the hands of Russia. By her occupation of Egypt, England is more deeply involved than ever in the European system. Her troops must stay there, and probably in the Soudan also ; and yet she cannot exercise supreme sway, owing to the European control that she is compelled to acknowledge, spite of the bluster of London journalists. And

in Asia England is absolutely responsible for the government of two hundred millions of people, while her rulers and agents are called upon to watch with unceasing vigilance the resistless stride of the eastern Slavonic power. In short, England has built up an ever-increasing empire, which needs an ever-increasing supply of men and money, and which everywhere comes in contact with the real or fancied interests of other European powers, resulting in endless wars and deeper and deeper complications. So much is this now the case that the English Cabinet is no longer master of the situation. The Liberal Cabinet comes into office with professions of peace and retrenchment ; and its career is one long record of war, conquest, annexation, and huge expenditure. And this not because Mr. Gladstone did not honestly mean to carry out a policy of peace and retrenchment, but because imperial necessities overruled personal inclinations.

Into this lazar-house of old-world political diseases the advocates of imperial federation propose to introduce the healthy, vigorous peoples of the new continents, taking them from their proper sphere and connecting them with an old-world power in whose ever-increasing complications they would be inextricably involved. It must be deliberately said that he who knowingly and of set purpose does this, is an enemy of these young countries. And if we take the most important of them, Canada, we cannot fail to see that its interests are sacrificed even now to the imperial connection, and that they would be sacrificed to a far greater extent under imperial federation. While the debt of the United States has been reduced by enormous sums, the debt of Canada is increasing by leaps and bounds, until now a people numbering only five millions, who ought to have no debt at all and scarcely any expenses of government, are crushed to the ground with financial burdens. And how incurred? Incurred mainly for imperial purposes. First, there is the *roi fainéant*, with his silly court at Ottawa to keep up. This institution is positively degrading to democratic Canada, as well as being a prolific cause of corruption. Then there are the railroads, constructed so largely for imperial and strategic purposes, some of them almost useless, but all having cost enormous sums, out of which contractors and politicians have notoriously enriched themselves. What can be thought from a rational, commercial point of view, of the Inter-colonial Railway, which was built for political purposes? And would such a line have been constructed had

Canada not been politically connected with a European country? And the Canadian Pacific Railway, constructed mainly to keep the Dominion together and to prevent British Columbia from seceding, is proving a tremendous additional burden to the people.

Then, again, there is the huge tariff. Why should there be any Canadian tariff, except for purposes of revenue? And why should hundreds of customs officials be stationed at vast expense along an imaginary line of three thousand miles to collect insignificant dues, a process connected with which there is a large amount of inevitable corruption? The answer is, that Canada must be protected against the United States. But seeing that people who speak the same language, in whose veins flows the same blood, who have the same religion, and practically the same laws, and very nearly identical systems of government, and are separated only by an imaginary line, must have substantially identical interests, why do they not reciprocate, instead of keeping up this insane system by which Canada is being slowly but surely impoverished and exhausted? The answer is, that Canada is artificially connected with England, and so is prevented from consulting her own interests, and forming a commercial, leading inevitably to a political, union with the United States. There never was a more palpable instance of all the just interests of a great country being sacrificed at the shrine of imperialism. If the people of Canada cannot be induced to see that this line of policy is certain economical disaster for them, Carlyle's estimate of the proportion of fools in England will not be wholly inapplicable in England's chief colony. But happily a considerable and increasing portion of the Canadian people have arrived at the conclusion that they cannot afford to carry on this policy for the sake of an imperialist sentiment. At a conference of the Canadian Liberal Party, under the presidency of the Liberal leader, Mr. Edward Blake, a resolution has been unanimously adopted demanding the right of the Canadian Government to conclude and ratify treaties with foreign powers, without any reference to the Government of Great Britain. This means, of course, Canadian independence, to which the Liberal Party in Canada is now committed. Both in Manitoba and British Columbia there is a growing party in favor of secession, as there is even in the specially "loyal" province of Ontario. Such a feeling is still more widely spread in the Maritime Provinces.

Such facts as these show that, spite of the loyalty to England

which is admitted to exist in Canada, the people of that country will ultimately take whatever course may be regarded as conducive to her legitimate interests and necessary development. In a word, Canada never can become a great country so long as she is politically connected with England. That connection involves the crippling of her resources, the undue taxation of her people, the restriction of her immigration, and the reign of a stagnant provincialism which forces itself on the attention of every visitor. The connection likewise renders Canada liable to be involved in any war into which England may be plunged ; a contingency that may be brought about at any time by the course of events in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Further, the federal union of England and Canada would, by building up an English power on the American continent, probably bring about at some time a collision with the United States. It may fairly be demanded, therefore, that those who place the general interests of humanity above the prestige of Great Britain should resolutely oppose imperial federation, so far at least as Canada is concerned.

No one can doubt that the independence and secession of Canada, whenever accomplished, will produce a profound effect upon the whole imperial connection. It will destroy the prestige of the Empire and will act as a solvent upon the imperialist sentiment. But it would be erroneous to suppose that the connection of England with her other colonial groups stands on the same footing as her connection with Canada. In the case of Canada, the proximity of the United States is the great determining factor. Even were there no American Republic, the difficulties of a federal union between Canada and England would be immense, for the reasons already alleged ; but the presence of the United States—Canada's natural and inevitable ally—renders the difficulties insuperable.

The case of each of the other colonial groups must be considered on its own merits. The Cape has been a source of trouble and of enormous cost to England ever since she had it ; and the situation there to-day is worse, from the English point of view, than it has ever previously been. I do not know who would weep for its secession, except Mr. Forster and the editor of the "*Pall Mall Gazette*." The past seven or eight years of South African history form one of the most disgraceful chapters in modern records. The colonists have been unscrupulous, the British agents

have countenanced plunder under the specious names of protectorate and annexation, the natives have been swindled and murdered, religious cant and commercial greed have formed an unholy alliance, and the English Government has proved itself blundering, ignorant, and incompetent. Its blunders, however, are due, not to the ill intentions of its members, but to the system. England tries to do what, in the nature of things, she cannot do. A committee of gentlemen sitting round a table in Downing Street cannot possibly understand the condition of affairs thousands of miles away in South Africa. Accordingly, they rely on their agents for information. These agents are all of the class that believes in annexation and a spirited policy. They advise the Cabinet in accordance with their own predilections. The Cabinet acts on the advice, to find, when it is too late, that the facts of the case are erroneously reported to it. This was exactly what Sir Bartle Frere did in South Africa when he led the English Government to believe that a South African confederation was generally desired by the people, and that the Boers of the Transvaal were consumed with a burning desire to be incorporated into the British Empire. What disasters have accrued from that fatal policy all the world knows. A similar process, it may be pointed out in passing, has been going on in Egypt. The necessity for the ultimate cessation of the connection with the Cape is rendered the more obvious because Englishmen there are in a minority, and the present Premier is absolutely hostile to the home Government. Union is quite impossible, for a very strong assertion of imperial authority on the part of England would almost certainly lead to a great civil war throughout South Africa, which would not only dangerously tax the not too immense military resources of England, but would lead to further far-reaching consequences by reason of the probable reversion of Holland and of all Dutch colonies and possessions to Germany, and the very striking development of German commerce and colonization recently manifested in South and Central Africa.

The third group of colonies is the Australasian, comprising Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, and the smaller islands of the South Pacific. The position of this group is different from that either of South Africa or Canada. The Australasian colonies are more intensely English than either of the other groups. There are no fellow-colonists of foreign birth or extraction, like the Dutch in

South Africa or the French in Canada; nor is there any great neighboring nation like the United States. These colonies are to a great extent isolated from the rest of the world, and are peopled almost entirely by persons of English birth or extraction. Consequently, some of the forces that in Canada and in South Africa are making for political separation do not operate here, and it is possible therefore that the close relation of these colonies to England may be of much longer duration. But when all this has been duly allowed for, the objections to imperial federation between England and her Australasian colonies still remain. Such a federation would take these colonies out of their rightful sphere, and introduce them into the European political circle. Their blood and treasure would become liable to be spent in maintaining English rule in India, or in fighting France on the Egyptian question. If war broke out, what would be the situation of these colonies, on the unimpeachable testimony of the military and naval authorities that have lately been trying to frighten the English people about the condition of their iron-clads and coaling-stations and the supply of their torpedo-boats and big guns? It may be gathered from the testimony of these persons that a peaceful citizen of Sydney or of Melbourne might find a telegram in his morning paper telling of a rupture between England and France on the subject of Egypt, or between England and Russia on the subject of Afghanistan; might learn before retiring to bed that war had been declared; and after a sleep, broken, feverish, and haunted with dreams almost as awful as those of a London editor, might listen to the guns of a French iron-clad or a Russian cruiser while shaving in the morning at his dressing-table. Seriously, can any arrangement be permanently justifiable that places the peace, progress, and prosperity of Australia and New Zealand at the mercy of some European quarrel or intrigue with which those countries have no more legitimate concern than Greenland and Patagonia?

The sum of the whole matter lies then in this: What are the manifest interests of the colonies themselves? The question will not be settled, as most of the English imperialists appear to imagine, in England; it will be settled in the respective colonies. And the colonists will settle it in accordance with their own interests. They will consider whether their fiscal policy shall be molded in accordance with the wants and wishes of English capitalists. They will consider whether their interests will be promoted

by connection with the intrigues of European diplomacy and the rivalries of European statesmen. They will consider whether they should impose financial burdens on themselves in order to promote English foreign policy. They will consider whether either the British Parliament or some hypothetical federal council could manage any portion of their own affairs for them better than their own governments and parliaments can do. And they will do this freely and independently, quite regardless of the opinions or wishes of English "fair-traders" or military men or colonial agents.

It is the more necessary to insist upon this, since in England the question is always looked at from the English point of view. The imperialists in England always, avowedly or tacitly, advocate federation because it would be good for England, not at all because it would necessarily be good for the colonies. No doubt they assume it to be good for the colonies, or have persuaded themselves that it is so; but this is a matter with them of quite minor importance. To the average Englishman, England is as much the "hub" of the solar system as Boston to any Bostonian; and, to quote Dr. Holmes, "you couldn't pry that out of" an Englishman, "if you had the tire of all creation straightened out for a crowbar." Thus the "fair-traders," as they call themselves, look upon the colonies as convenient instruments for maintaining the supremacy of British trade. And the average Jingo wishes the colonies to contribute toward an imperial navy that shall be equal to the combined navies of Europe, and shall thus maintain English prestige in the eyes of European sovereigns and statesmen. All this is to be done for the glory and profit of England.

The real motive power, therefore, of this agitation for imperial federation becomes perfectly obvious. It is by no means a great humanitarian movement for securing peace on earth and good will among men. It is, stripped of all the pretentious verbiage and vague rhetoric with which it has been adorned, an attempt on the part of certain interests to maintain their hold over mankind. The military and aristocratic class has joined hands in this matter with a large section of the capitalist class, in order to secure the promotion of English financial interests, and to strengthen, if possible, English imperialism. Well-meaning men with other objects in view may have helped in the movement, and may do so in the future; for it cannot be denied that the idea of a close bond connecting English people acts as a powerful sentiment, which may

be felt to be convincing when unconnected with reason and with a complete knowledge of the facts of the case. But the accidental presence of well-meaning men should not blind any one to the real character of a movement that constitutes the greatest, because most insidious, danger that the cause of democracy in England has to face. It is a movement that in its essence is intended to divert the broad stream of human progress into the narrow channel of English capitalism. Readers of Professor Seeley's "Expansion of England" are misled by the glittering ideal they see in that book. The real thing is the union of such people as Lords Bradbourne, Rosebery, and Dunraven, who know perfectly well what they want, in the interest of a cause fatal to the development of English democracy, and still more fatal to all the just interests of those young commonwealths beyond the seas.

WILLIAM CLARKE.